



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS  
GREG ABBOTT

October 14, 2003

Mr. Brad Norton  
Assistant City Attorney  
City of Austin  
P. O. Box 1546  
Austin, Texas 78767-1546

OR2003-7297

Dear Mr. Norton:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 189393.

The Austin Police Department (the "department") received a request for information related to a named police officer. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101 and 552.1175 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Section 552.101 of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "information considered to be confidential by law, either constitutional, statutory, or by judicial decision." This section encompasses information deemed confidential by statutes such as section 143.089 of the Local Government Code. We understand that the city is a civil service city under chapter 143 of the Local Government Code. Section 143.089 contemplates two different types of personnel files, a police officer's civil service file that the civil service director is required to maintain, and an internal file that the police department may maintain for its own use. Local Gov't Code § 143.089(a), (g). In cases in which a police department investigates a police officer's misconduct and takes disciplinary action against an officer, it is required by section 143.089(a)(2) to place all investigatory records relating to the investigation and disciplinary action, including background documents such as complaints, witness statements, and documents of like nature from individuals who were not in a supervisory capacity, in the police officer's civil service file maintained under section 143.089(a). *Abbott v. Corpus Christi*, No. 03-02-00785-CV, slip op., 2003 WL 21241652, at \*7 (Tex. App.—Austin May 30, 2003, no pet. h.). All investigatory materials in a case resulting in disciplinary action are "from the employing department" when they are held by or in possession of the

department because of its investigation into a police officer's misconduct, and the department must forward them to the civil service commission for placement in the civil service personnel file. *Id.* at \*5, \*7. Such records are subject to release under chapter 552 of the Government Code. *See* Local Gov't Code § 143.089(f); Open Records Decision No. 562 at 6 (1990). However, information maintained in a police department's internal file pursuant to section 143.089(g) is confidential and must not be released. *City of San Antonio v. Texas Attorney Gen.*, 851 S.W.2d 946, 949 (Tex. App.--Austin 1993, writ denied).<sup>1</sup>

You state that the submitted information is maintained in the departmental personnel file pursuant to section 143.089(g), and that none of the submitted information relates to an incident involving disciplinary action under sections 143.051-.055 of the Local Government Code. We therefore conclude that the submitted information is confidential pursuant to section 143.089(g) of the Local Government Code and must be withheld under section 552.101 of the Government Code. Because we are able to make this determination, we need not address your argument under section 552.1175 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one

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<sup>1</sup>We note that section 143.089(g) requires a police department that receives a request for information maintained in a file under section 143.089(g) to refer that person to the civil service director or the director's designee. You inform us that you have done so.

of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,



Sarah I. Swanson  
Assistant Attorney General  
Open Records Division

SIS/lmt

Ref: ID# 189393

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Kathryn E. Ryle  
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(w/o enclosures)